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WHAT MAKES A MARRIAGE HAPPY?

BY DAVID R. MACE

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WHAT MAKES A MARRIAGE HAPPY?

BY DAVID R. MACE

Dr. Mace has studied marriage and family relationships for well over twenty years. He founded the marriage counseling services in his native Britain. In 1949 he came to the U.S.A., and is currently Associate Professor of Family Study in the Department of Psychiatry of the University of Pennsylvania's Medical School, and Staff Consultant to the Marriage Council of Philadelphia. . . . The drawings in this pamphlet are by Richard Shelton.

"So they were married, and lived happily ever after."

Mother closed the story-book. The children, cosy and contented, fell peacefully asleep and dreamt of the Fairy Prince and his True Love, riding off together into the sunset, to a life of unending bliss.

This is not just the dream of children. It is the dream of grown-ups too. Happiness has always been the great goal that people have hoped to achieve in marriage. It is true that in the past, and even today in many parts of the world, not much notice has been taken of the private dreams of bride and bridegroom. Often the family has arranged the marriage for its own convenience. "It will be good for our prestige if Hilda marries the boss's son." "Old Moneybags has pots of money, and our John is going to marry his daughter." But even when young people were used as pawns in a game, even when marriage was judged only by the number of sons born, men and women still dreamed their dreams. And the dreams were handed down, from generation to generation, in the love songs and love stories that were told and retold.

the goal of happiness in marriage

In our Western world of today, we have recognized quite frankly that happiness is what everyone is looking for in marriage. As never before in the World's history, young people are free to choose their mates. And they are choosing, not for wealth or prestige, but for love. "Will he make me happy?" That is the question.

Has this led to a great increase in happy marriages? Nobody knows, and nobody will ever know. The fact that there are more *broken* marriages today doesn't necessarily mean that there is more unhappiness. It only means that some of the unhappiness comes to the surface, and we all know about it. We have no way of judging how many couples would have separated in former times if it had been possible for them to do so.

But we do know that, whatever may have been true in the past, many men and women today are failing to reach the goal they have set themselves — the goal of happy marriage. Thousands of them openly end their life together by separation or divorce. Thousands of others seek the help of marriage counselors, social workers, ministers and physicians. Tens of thousands write about their troubles to the advice columns in newspapers and magazines. No one knows how many just unburden themselves to relatives or friends.

why do so many fail?

Add all this up and you get a disturbing picture of frustration, disappointment, and misery. This has led some cynics to suggest that marriage has been overrated, that the dream of happiness is an illusion. I once met a man who told me he had never encountered a happy marriage in his life, and he frankly didn't believe there was such a thing. Of course he was quite wrong. There are plenty of very happy marriages; unfortunately, they get very little publicity.

But why do so many fail to find the happiness they seek? We can answer that question only as we try to understand the relationship between husband and wife. What is the secret of success in married life? What makes a happy marriage? What makes a good marriage?

Something has been learned in recent years about this important subject. Attempts have been made, by psychologists and sociologists, to measure happiness in marriage. This isn't an easy task, because human personalities are very complicated mechanisms! Lewis Ter-

man, who made a careful study of 2,500 married people to find out what made some happy and others unhappy, concluded that "The factors which make for happiness or unhappiness in marriage present an ever-changing pattern." All the same, he tried to study these factors, and came up with some results. You can check your own marriage, if you like, against the standards which he found applied to the happiest couples in the group he studied.

how happy is your marriage?

According to the research of Dr. Lewis Terman, the most happily married couples are those who can say:

1. *We are good companions and have very few conflicts.*
2. *We always resolve our disagreements by mutual adjustment.*
3. *We find little or nothing in marriage to complain of.*
4. *We don't regret the choice we made, and we would choose each other again.*
5. *We consider our marriage to be definitely happier than the average.*

Besides the statistical studies, we have learned a good deal from what we call clinical experience. Those of us who deal at first-hand with a great many marriage problems soon find that certain difficulties crop up again and again. So we get to know what makes people *unhappy* in marriage; and we guess that other people, who don't have these troubles to contend with, get along more happily together. Our guesses may not always be right, of course; but we have reason to believe that some of them are correct. What we need most of all at the present time is to study more and more happy marriages. This isn't easy to do, because happily married couples don't always take kindly to the idea of offering themselves as guinea-pigs!

expect too much?

This author, after twenty-five years of marriage counseling, believes that many people are unhappy in marriage because they expected to get too much with too little effort. Georg Karlsson, the Swedish expert, said that unhappiness in marriage is the difference between what you want and what you get. Naturally, therefore, the more you demand the harder you will be to please. A friend of mine told me, after a visit to Italy, that he was disappointed with Venice. When I

questioned him, he finally admitted, "My friends said so many wonderful things about it that I expected something out of this world!"

Too many young people have been approaching marriage like that. They have a highly romantic idea of married life as a state of heavenly bliss that just goes on effortlessly for ever and ever. A real-life, flesh-and-blood relationship between two ordinary mortals just won't stand up to that sort of expectation. Marriage is only one among many human enterprises; and the rules that apply in other areas of our lives apply here as well. In fact, we find that the people who succeed in marriage are, generally speaking, the people who succeed in other human relationships; and vice versa.

So if you think of marriage as a sort of magic wand that is going to solve all your personal problems, or as a way of escape from the strains and stresses of life, or as an investment that will give you high dividends and quick returns for very little effort, you are doomed to failure at the start. Dr. Carney Landis, who directed a very thorough study of a group of unmarried and married women, tells us that "no girl should be advised to marry in the hope that marriage will solve her essential unhappiness. We have no evidence that it ever does offer such a solution, and we have abundant evidence that the woman continues to be unhappy and maladjusted and adds her unhappiness to the life problems of her husband."

looking for the wrong things?

To achieve a happy marriage, therefore, we need first of all to give people a clear idea of what they can expect to get out of married life. If what they expect is reasonably near to what they are likely to find, they will in all probability be satisfied with the result. Quite often, people are looking for the wrong things in marriage — hankering after what is unattainable for them, and failing to appreciate the blessings they actually possess. Carol sits in the movie theater and compares George, sitting at her side, with the film star on the screen. By that standard, poor George doesn't come out very well. What Carol needs to accept is that she wouldn't have an earthly chance of marrying the film star; that even if she did, he would probably act very differently off the screen; and that good, solid, dependable George can really contribute far more to her fulfillment in life than her celluloid idol ever could.

Does this mean that we have to give up our dreams about marriage? Some of them, yes. But others, no. What it does mean, though, is that we have to see happy marriage not as a gift handed to us on our wedding-day, but as something we have to create together by long years of toil and effort. Mantegazza, the wise Italian doctor who understood marriage so well, said, "To find the sister soul to your own — the one with whom you will sing the hymn of perfect happiness all your life, the only perfect happiness, that of a union of two — this is the rarest good fortune. In most cases you will find neither absolute discord nor ideal harmony, but a partial accord, which with labour and good will you will be able to convert gradually into perfect harmony."

What the bride and bridegroom have, as they stand together at the open door to a new life together, are the raw materials out of which married happiness can be achieved. Of course they have also the excitement of a new experience, and a very wonderful new experience. But that can't last. The newness will wear off. Then the superficial excitement of the honeymoon must be replaced by the more lasting satisfactions of a good relationship, achieved through a

process of mutual adjustment. The bliss of the early days is not, unfortunately, a very reliable test of the ultimate success of the marriage. Much more important is the understanding of what to expect and how to work together to attain it.

We still have much to learn about what it takes to achieve a happy marriage. But there are some things we do already know as a result of our accumulated study and experience.

who is a good marriage prospect?

We know, for instance, that there are some people who are better marriage prospects than others. Dr. Lewis Terman tried to describe the person likely to be happy in marriage.

Here he is. He is cooperative in his attitude toward other people. He works well with those in authority over him. He is kind and sympathetic toward his inferiors, and always ready to help anyone in trouble. He is conventional in his attitude about abiding by rules and obeying the law. He is friendly toward members of the opposite sex, whom he treats as equals. In a gathering of people he is at ease.

By contrast, here is the person likely to be an unhappy marriage partner. He is not sure of himself in social relationships, and usually feels inferior. When he finds himself in a superior position, however, he tends to be "bossy" and domineering. He doesn't like taking orders from others and hates to be involved in competition because he is a bad loser. He tends to be negative, to be a chronic complainer, and to be "agin" all authority.

This is, of course, only a general picture. All men and women who answer these descriptions don't fall automatically into the categories of the successful and the unsuccessful in marriage. There are many exceptions to the rule, and we probably all know some of them. All the same, the picture is clear enough to be convincing. It is obvious that a person who gets on well in his relationships with others outside the home is likely also to get on well in the intimate relationships within the family.

married love

The most happily married people are those who love each other deeply. No one ever hears of a really loving couple talking about the possibility of separation or divorce.

Love, however, is a big subject. Thomas Carlyle, after hearing a sermon on it, said the preacher made him think of a flea struggling in a barrel of treacle! He was out of his depth! So can anyone be who tries to explain just what love is.

What many people call love today is just sex attraction. Married love is far more than that. It includes the feeling you have for a close and dear companion with whom you share part of your life — friendship-love, you might call it. It includes the desire to cherish, help, and care for the one you love — like the tender, protective emotion you feel for a child. It includes the willingness to sacrifice yourself, if need be, for the loved one — altruistic love, as we call it.

Let's begin with sex attraction and then move on to the others.

What makes a marriage different from other relationships is that men and women are made for each other, and there's a kind of magnetic attraction that draws them together. The Bible says that in marriage the two become one flesh. Nowadays we would express this by saying that marriage is based on a sex relationship.

how important is sex?

How important is sex, really, for married happiness? There's no simple answer to that question. In recent years some people have talked as if sex was the major value in human life, and the most important element in marriage. The experts no longer take that view. In the studies that have been made, some very happy couples have been found whose sex adjustment was considered to be quite poor; and some unhappy couples who seemed to be physically well adjusted.

But if sex isn't basic, it *is* important, because for most couples it is the supreme expression of their married love. The knowledge that it is often abused must not blind us to the fact that, rightly used, sex strengthens the marriage bond by increasing the tenderness and affection between husband and wife. If, on the other hand, the couple are unhappy and frustrated in this area of their relationship, it is much harder for them to feel warm and sweet toward one another.

There are two points at which, according to the research findings, sex difficulties most often spoil married happiness. The first is when the wife can't respond and enjoy the intimacies of marriage. This bothers the modern woman much more than it did her grandmother. Nowadays a wife expects this part of married life to be very exciting,

and she is disappointed if it doesn't turn out that way. It bothers the modern husband too, because he has been given the idea that it's his fault if his wife doesn't prove to be fully responsive.

Probably husbands in the past were often ignorant and clumsy, and the feelings of wives were not given enough consideration. But today we have gone to the other extreme. Far too many couples are worrying quite unnecessarily because they can't seem to come up to the standards of the textbooks. Nothing spoils the care-free joy of marital intimacy more than the worries that arise from taking it too seriously.

The other sexual problem is when the physical needs of husband and wife don't seem to agree. In the early days of marriage counseling, we used to hear a good many complaints about husbands who made unreasonable demands. Now we know that there are also wives whose needs for love-making are greater than their husbands can meet. However, this difficulty also can be exaggerated.

incompatible — or inflexible?

Undoubtedly there are cases of genuine physical incompatibility. But most of these problems come down to the question of what we call "give and take" in marriage. A loving couple can work out a mutual adjustment because one will usually be willing to give a little more and the other to take a little less. The more affection there is between husband and wife, the more eager they will be not just to satisfy themselves, but to make each other happy. I believe that almost any married couple whose first concern is to give each other fulfillment will be able to work out some sort of mutually acceptable relationship. And this is what the studies have shown. It isn't the particular pattern which the sex relationship follows that matters. It's the *agreement* of the couple that whatever pattern they follow is what they want, or the best they can expect.

the "we" feeling

The technical way of putting it is to say that the sex relationship is secondary to what Dr. Harriet Mowrer called the "response relation." Dr. Ernest Burgess means the same thing when he talks about "emotional interdependence." Dr. Fritz Kunkel prefers to call it the "we-feeling." It doesn't matter what name you use, as long as you realize that this is the real heart of a good marriage,

because everything else depends on it. If two people love each other in such a way that they don't think of themselves as "I" or "you," but as "we," then they have the power to solve almost any problem that comes along. They are *united*, and nothing can drive a permanent wedge between them and separate them.

Marriage counselors have now come to understand this much more clearly. At one time, when people came to us with sex problems or in-law problems or money problems, we took these problems at their face value, and tried to help the couple to find better techniques for dealing with sex or in-laws or money. We still do that to some extent. But now we know that improving the technique isn't nearly so important as improving the response relation.

improving the emotional response

How is this done? By trying to get more positive emotional feeling flowing between husband and wife. When married people feel frustrated, they can get choked up with negative emotion — resentment, anger, bitterness — so that no positive emotion can flow. In that state, they may feel convinced that they don't love each other.

I remember a couple who felt like that, and decided to part. At the critical moment a tragedy came into their lives. Their little boy was knocked down by a car and seriously injured. They were summoned to the hospital, and as they stood at his bedside all the anger died in their hearts, tears of grief and shame flowed, and love came back.

That was a rather dramatic case, of course. But it's a situation anyone can understand. Positive emotions, when they are strong enough, can drive negative emotions out. The art of being good lovers in marriage is to keep the positive feelings flowing between you. Expressing affection, for instance, puts warmth and tenderness into your relationship. Giving encouragement is another way. Being sympathetic and understanding toward each other in difficult situations creates gratitude and confidence. These seem quite small and ordinary things; yet we are learning that they may be vitally important for the success or failure of a marriage. Of course they are just expressions of love. But love is such a vague word that we can get hold of the idea better by breaking it down into its many parts. This has been done scientifically in recent years. At the Family Study Center in Chicago, for instance, attempts have been made to find ways of helping people to increase their "interpersonal competence" in order that they may be able to express their feelings better in family relationships.

Pamela and Arthur

Here are two illustrations of married love in action.* The first concerns a couple who might easily have clashed seriously. Pamela, the wife, is speaking:—

"Arthur's ideal evening is to stay at home, relax, plan the next day's work, and go to bed early. My ideal is to go out, see people, have fun and excitement. The great thing is that Arthur understands what I want and need out of life. He never belittles my point of view. He understands me, and he does his best to help me. At first we used to have tremendous arguments. Now we hardly ever argue. We have adjusted to one another. I'd say we were very happily married."

Do you see how these two, with very different temperaments, have achieved a good response relation? Arthur makes the effort to understand Pamela, though she is different from him; she is grateful. Her gratitude encourages him to be more understanding; and so her gratitude increases. All positive emotions! Yet if he *hadn't* tried to understand, it might have worked the opposite way. He might have been critical, she might have responded by being

* These are adapted from Burgess and Locke. See reading references, page 20.

defiant, which would have made him more critical. Finally she would probably have gone her own way, he would have withdrawn, and the marriage would have failed.

Doris and Jim

In the second illustration Jim, the husband, says, "I was plagued by feelings of inferiority. Doris was very sympathetic. She has always been kind and patient, though I know I am very difficult at times. When I got depressed, she used to make me sit down with a paper and pencil and write out my good points. She had a little saying, 'If you're happy, then I'm happy too.' It worked wonders. We're a very happy couple now. I owe everything to Doris."

Here again we see excellent response. Notice how the "we-feeling" has been built up between them. "When you're happy, I'm happy." Yet you can see that this marriage, wrongly handled, could have worked out very differently.

Love is a wonderful power in human life. In marriage it is the great wonderworker, the source of the kind of happiness these couples came to enjoy. But it isn't just a vague influence coming out of nowhere. It is a state of mutual feeling that we build up, by a multitude of loving words and deeds, into an experience of deep and lasting happiness.

partnership in marriage

Marriage, however, is more than two people in love. It is also two people in partnership. And the partnership must work if the marriage is to be happy.

It isn't enough for a husband to be able to tell his wife in glowing terms how beautiful she is and how much he loves her. He must also be able to provide her with a home, bring in a steady income, manage the family's business affairs, deal with the children, organize outings and vacations, and do the odd jobs around the house and yard. As Mantegazza puts it, "To drink from the eyes of a woman who is a perfect fountain of delight, to feel the doors of paradise opened to us by her lips; and then all at once to be obliged to speak of *income* amidst such intoxicating pleasures; it is hard, cruel, abominable — but it is necessary!"

The wife, too, has to be more than an adorable sweetheart. She must be a comrade to her man, a housewife, a manager of money, a mother to her children, the family representative in the social life of the community, perhaps an auxiliary bread-winner. It takes quite a talented person to be really good at all these things.

Two things are specially important in enabling a couple to work out a good partnership. The first is adaptability in both of them; the second is a sound, workable policy for decision-making.

the need for flexibility

Adaptability is much more important in marriage today than it was in the past. Grandpa and Grandma probably came from the same town, were brought up in the same kind of families, and generally accepted the same standards, habits, and tastes. In married life they probably went on living in the same community, doing the same kinds of things they had always done. Anyway, husbands and wives didn't get in each other's way much in those days. He went out to work and brought home the money; she stayed at home and brought up the children. The code was that they didn't interfere any more than was necessary in each other's affairs.

Modern marriage is much harder in this respect, because husband and wife frequently exchange roles; and the way in which they handle this complicated partnership may bring them into conflict.

Fortunately, the new world that is changing marriage is also changing us, so that we have more adaptable personalities. But sometimes one finds a rigid, stubborn, inflexible person. The marriage studies suggest that he and his partner aren't going to have an easy time settling down to their life together. This is specially true if the awkward one is the wife; the evidence suggests that in marriage today, as always, women do the most adjusting!

It has been found that there are three significant kinds of personality among husbands and wives — the dominant, the equalitarian, and the submissive. One study of a group of married couples showed that the best cooperation was achieved when both partners were equalitarian, and the next best when one was dominant and the other submissive. The really difficult situations were those in which there were two dominants — then the sparks really flew! Or two submissives who kept passing the buck to each other!

Some people are by nature more adaptable than others. But we have reason to believe that you can increase your adaptability by learning about human behavior through reading and study — just as you can learn to handle children and animals better when you understand how they feel and what they need. So if you want to be happy living with a husband, it makes sense to undertake some serious study of the masculine personality!

decision-making

Now let's consider decision-making. You'd be surprised how many decisions have to be made during a week of married life. And the way they are made has an important influence on the happiness of the marriage.

The most interesting study of this aspect of marriage was made in Australia by a team working under Professor Oeser. They found, among other things, that whereas in the rural areas husbands still make most of the family decisions, in the big cities the wives have pulled ahead and become the real bosses of the home!

However, the Oeser study doesn't favor either the husband's or the wife's making the decisions. Joint decisions, mutually arrived at, are much better.

It was found that married couples, when they disagree, deal with the situation in three different ways. The first is for one to shout down the other. When this occurs, it usually creates resentment in the one who doesn't have his or her way; and if this goes on happening it poisons the marriage. You can't go on feeling happy in a relationship with someone who treats you like a door-mat.

The second way is when husband and wife both refuse to give in and no real decision is reached at all. Obviously this builds up a lot of hostility between them, and emotionally they are likely to drift apart. This is the real danger of a marriage between two dominant personalities.

The third way, which Oeser calls the "syncratic cooperative" method, is based on the democratic principle of looking together at all the facts and trying to find out what is really best. This is the method used in Quaker business meetings, where votes are never taken, but the discussion is continued until all are of one mind.

Although this method may take a lot of time and require a lot of self-control, we have evidence to show that it is the foundation of the most successful kind of partnership in marriage. So it is well worth cultivating. Every decision arrived at in this way strengthens the marriage and increases the confidence of husband and wife in each other.

room to breathe

What makes the partnership of marriage specially difficult is that it is a relationship of such close intimacy. In marriage you share nearly everything. At times this is pleasant; but there are other times in married life when you feel the desire to get away from this continual closeness. Dr. Kurt Lewin has made it clear that a person needs a certain amount of space to move about in, and that if you put two people too close together, and give them no chance to move away from each other, any tension that arises in their relationship may become quite severe.

This is something we need to understand and accept in marriage. When two people are deeply in love, they have a strong urge to get as close together as possible. But they must be careful not to make unreasonable demands of one another, or to invade one another's privacy. Sometimes I have heard marriage described as a *union* of two persons. That isn't true at all. Two people could only become one by ceasing to exist as separate individuals; and none of us would want that to happen! Marriage is a partnership in which we aim at *unity* — not union.

So we need not think of a happy marriage as one in which husband and wife must necessarily be together all the time. They

will often appreciate their fellowship all the more if they have other friends and other interests. There are times in married life when husband and wife feel very dependent on one another. There are other times when they feel the need to assert their independence.

do children bring happiness?

An important question is whether children increase married happiness. The answer most of us would give is "Yes, of course. Children are the fruit of marriage, and they ought to make it happier." It may be true that they *ought*. In practice, it doesn't follow that they *do*. What the researches have found is that if the marriage relationship is good and strong, the coming of children will further strengthen it. If it is weak and insecure, parenthood is likely to make it more so.

As a matter of fact, this is one of the best proved facts that have come out of all our marriage studies. Four of the most thorough American researches, covering many thousands of married people, all arrived at the conclusion that the happiness of a marriage isn't affected by the presence or absence of children. Another study found marriages happier without children in the early years, but less happy without them later. Another study found no difference between the happiness of childless couples and couples with one child, but discovered that those with several children were less happy. Still another found that marriages decreased in happiness as the families increased in size!

From these American studies we may turn to the Chesser research, much the biggest enquiry that has been made in England. What Dr. Chesser and his team found was that childless wives are on the whole rather happier than those who have children! Among those who are mothers, the number of children they have doesn't seem to make much difference to their happiness in marriage.

Before we jump to the wrong conclusions, let me add something else that seems to be very significant. The studies agreed that *having* children makes no difference to married happiness. But they also agreed that *wanting* children makes a great deal of difference.

I think this gives us a clue to the puzzle. Where married couples want children, even if they can't have them, this seems to draw them together and strengthen their marriage. On the other hand,

couples who don't really want children, but do have them, seem as a result to become unhappy in their married life. So a strong desire for children is a quality that favors good marriage, whether the desire is filled or not.

This is surely what we would expect. People who love children are usually warm, loving, outgoing personalities. People who don't like children tend to be self-centered, rigid, and lacking in humor and gaiety. Of these two types, most of us know which we would prefer as a marriage partner.

baby brings a crisis

What the studies have shown us, therefore, is that the coming of children doesn't of itself guarantee happiness. In fact, the experts conclude that parenthood is a *crisis* in a marriage. It's a test, and a very searching test, of the soundness of the relationship.

In trying to trace the development of serious trouble between husband and wife, it is significant that the situation often seems to have taken a decided turn for the worse with the arrival of the new baby. Not that the baby himself was the cause of the trouble, bless his little heart! But when he came, his mother became so preoccupied with the great task of motherhood that her husband felt neglected and shut out of her life, and from that point they began very slowly to drift apart.

Of course this usually means that they were somewhat estranged even before the baby came. Nothing could be worse than to advise couples who are drifting apart to have a baby (or another baby) in order "to bring them together." It occasionally works. But it is very bad advice because if, as usually happens, it *doesn't* work, the poor baby is regarded as having failed to fulfill the quite unreasonable responsibility of reconciling his estranged parents.

The bringing of a child into the world should ideally be an act of love, undertaken together by two people who are in a state of unity and harmony, who eagerly desire the child, and who are ready to accept the full responsibility of giving it their continued care and devotion. How much happier the world would be if this were always the case!

So we have to acknowledge, reluctantly, that if husbands and wives don't want children, or if they are not getting along well,

parenthood will not improve their chances of married happiness.

That's the negative side of the picture. But on the other side, we have the encouraging fact that if you both desire children, and you are deeply in love, parenthood will fill up your cup of happiness until it overflows. It's like the Bible text about yet more being given to those who already have!

the right approach to parenthood

When married people have the right approach to parenthood, it increases their happiness for two reasons. First, it binds them more closely together in a common task. Here is a great, solemn responsibility which they both fully share. The child is their joint production. Both have put something of their very selves into creating him. And it is now their joint task to guard and guide him through childhood and youth until he can go out into the world to live his own life. To a loving couple, standing together beside the cot of their adored child, there comes a deep feeling that in this experience they have reached the peak of happiness.

At the same time, parenthood turns their lives outward, away from themselves. One of the deepest truths about happiness is that it comes most often not to those who pursue it for its own sake, but to those who forget themselves in service to others. The devotion of parents to their children lifts them to a new nobility and dignity.

In every land and every age, husbands and wives have toiled and sacrificed, planned and struggled, to give their utmost for their children's welfare. They have not done this with any conscious

thought of seeking happiness. Yet they have found that this shared endeavor has linked their hearts together in a deep experience of loving fulfillment.

what have we learned?

Scientific research on the causes of success and failure in marriage has now been going on for over thirty years. From what we have learned so far, some conclusions seem to be pretty clear.

The Chesser research, which was based on information from a large group of English women, reached conclusions which may be taken broadly to represent the findings of the other studies. Dr. Chesser found that, next to childhood happiness, the factors that most favored successful marriage were a state of complete trust and confidence in each other before marriage, and the achievement of a mutually satisfactory sex adjustment in marriage itself. These were not the only things that mattered, of course. But the presence or absence of these factors made a tremendous difference. For example, among couples for whom these last two factors were present, over 90 per cent were happy. Among couples for whom they were both absent, only 25 per cent were happy.

If we take all three factors which Dr. Chesser found most decisive for married happiness, and broaden them out a little, I think we can arrive at a fairly reliable picture of the conditions under which a marriage is almost certain to be successful.

the importance of a happy childhood

The basic ingredients are two people who are mature and have those qualities which we sum up as "character." All marriage counselors know how important this is. People who have attitudes of kindness and consideration, who are trustworthy and dependable, whose ideals are high and who have the resolution to pursue them without giving up easily — these are the people who have what it takes to make the adjustments of marriage successfully.

Generally speaking, these are just the kind of people who come out of well-adjusted families. Those who come from unhappy homes may attain great heights of character; many in fact do. Yet no one will deny that good people come much more often from good homes than from bad ones.

trust and confidence

The second factor greatly favoring success in marriage is the coming together of two people who are "in tune" with one another. This means something much more than being "in love" in the popular sense. It is something very difficult to define. But it is based on compatibility in the truest sense — a state of affinity and harmony between two personalities which is felt intuitively by both. The better they get to know each other, the more sure they become that they belong to each other.

In some ways it may seem dangerous to make the feelings of the couple the final test of their compatibility. Yet if they are really honest about their feelings, they will find them a reliable guide. A surprising number of people go into marriage with secret doubts, misgivings, and anxieties. They do not have that serene trust and confidence in each other, and in their ability to succeed in marriage, which Dr. Chesser found to be so important. Such people ought to examine their doubts and uncertainties very carefully before going ahead, for their chances of happiness may be poor.

good sexual adjustment

The third factor of major importance is that, reasonably soon after marriage, the couple should be able to feel happy about that flow of warm and tender feeling between them which accompanies a satisfying sex relationship. The importance of good sex adjustment to happiness in marriage is not to be thought of in mechanical terms, or as mere physical satisfaction. It is something much deeper than that. It is the ability of these two people to give and receive love, and tenderness, and affection, through all kinds of bodily expressions that are free from the hindering hesitancies which guilt and fear and shame produce. Good sex adjustment doesn't mean measuring up to some description you have read in a book. It means outgoing warmth and freedom in the whole range of your feelings for one another. It is the capacity to enjoy the intimacy of belonging to one another completely, to rejoice in the full expression of your manhood and womanhood, and to be eager and glad to meet each other's needs. When two married people feel like that toward each other, they have a sure foundation upon which all the other aspects of married life — partnership, service, and sacri-

fice — can be securely built into a strong and lasting edifice. In that sense we may interpret sex as being central to married happiness.

These, then, are some of the things we know at the present time about the achievement of happiness in marriage. We still have a great deal to learn, and new studies are continually being undertaken. As we begin to understand marriage better, we shall be able to increase gradually the number of happily adjusted husbands and wives, and so reduce the tragic incidence of broken homes which has been a melancholy feature of our Western society in recent years. Taking the long view, there is ground for optimism. We have come a long way in the last thirty years; we shall travel much further in the next thirty.

WHAT TO READ

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